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Intervention with Difficult Members in Small Group Diversity Training

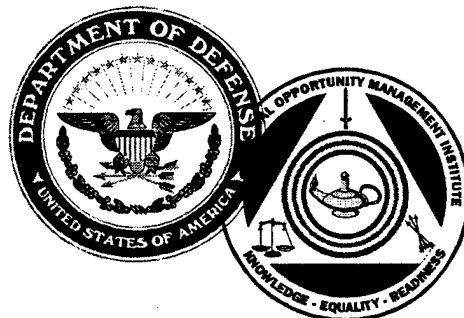
by

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Summer 2002

20030917 062

DEOMI Research Report 02-10



| REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE | | | | | Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188 | |
|--|-------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|--|---|--|
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| PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS. | | | | | | |
| 1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 20-05-2003 | | 2. REPORT TYPE Research | | | 3. DATES COVERED (From - To) June - August 2002 | |
| 4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Intervention with Difficult Members in Small Group Diversity Training | | | | 5a. CONTRACT NUMBER N00014-97-1-1055 | | |
| | | | | 5b. GRANT NUMBER N/A | | |
| | | | | 5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER N/A | | |
| 6. AUTHOR(S) Judith L. Johnson | | | | 5d. PROJECT NUMBER N/A | | |
| | | | | 5e. TASK NUMBER N/A | | |
| | | | | 5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER N/A | | |
| 7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Directorate of Research Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute 740 O'Malley Road MS9121 Patrick Air Force Base, FL 32925-3399 | | | | 8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER DEOMI Research Report 02-10 | | |
| 9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Office of Naval Research 800 N. Quincy Street Arlington, VA 22032 | | | | 10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) ONR | | |
| | | | | 11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S) N/A | | |
| 12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited. | | | | | | |
| 13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES | | | | | | |
| 14. ABSTRACT A general overview of a philosophy of intervention with difficult group members is provided. Common difficult small group member behaviors are then described including resistance, direct and indirect hostility, lack of participation, and minimization/denial. Possible interventions and examples specific to DEOMI are provided. | | | | | | |
| 15. SUBJECT TERMS Equal Opportunity, Diversity, Group Training, Group Facilitation | | | | | | |
| 16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF: | | | 17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT | 18. NUMBER OF PAGES 16 | 19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Jerry C. Scarpate | |
| a. REPORT | b. ABSTRACT | c. THIS PAGE | | | 19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code) (321) 494-2676 | |
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Intervention with Difficult Members in Small Group Diversity Training

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Abstract

A general overview of a philosophy of intervention with difficult group members is provided. Common difficult small group member behaviors are then described including resistance, direct and indirect hostility, lack of participation, and minimization/denial. Possible interventions and examples specific to DEOMI are provided.

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Opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and should not be construed to represent the official position of DEOMI, the military services, or the Department of Defense

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Diversity training often elicits strong emotions within a small group setting. Additionally, group settings encourage the development of small group dynamics and processes, and include the opportunity for difficult group member behavior (resistance to change) to emerge. There are common dimensions typically involved for effective management of a difficult small group member, regardless of the precise nature of the behavior. These dimensions involve facilitator attitudes, specific behaviors, and management of personal reactions to the difficult individual. Based upon some classic sources on small group behavior and over ten years experience as a licensed clinical psychologist, this paper addresses these dimensions. Further, difficult member behaviors are described and actual facilitator comments are included to illustrate potential issues and interventions related to such behaviors. Finally, specific facilitator interventions for specific problem behaviors are provided.

In terms of conveyed attitudes, it is important for the facilitator to demonstrate the importance and value of the person separate from the difficult behavior. For example, if a member behaves inappropriately, the facilitator should not be dismissive or denigrating of the member, but of the specific displayed behavior. The facilitator also needs to be honest with the member, indicating annoyance and even anger without directing derogatory statements towards the inner core of the person's character. Similarly, the facilitator must resist the temptation to return sarcasm or anger with the same, and instead must model more appropriate responses. In short, the task of the facilitator is to acknowledge the problem behavior, while avoiding judgment and labeling of the individual.

Difficult member behavior is often conceptualized as resistance, which has classically been viewed as resistance to change or psychological discomfort associated with self-disclosure. When group members are educated regarding the role of resistance, they often become adept at identifying it when it occurs and at understanding its protective function. The facilitator should state observations of resistance (as manifested in difficult behaviors) in a tentative way, and demonstrate sensitivity to a member's culture. At the same time, the difficult member should be told how their behavior impacts others within the group. Other members should be encouraged to state how they are affected by the problematic behavior as well, with the facilitator blocking judgments, criticisms, or evaluative statements. As Corey and Corey (1997) note, counterproductive and difficult group member styles are often related to defense mechanisms that serve a protective function for the individual. Hence, they advise the group facilitator to "ask yourself whether you're competent to deal with what would be revealed should the defenses be given up." (p. 200)

When members demonstrate difficult behavior, it is critical for the facilitator to be aware of their own reactions and potential issues regarding the nature of the behavior. Facilitators should avoid personalizing member behavior and be capable of confronting the behavior in a caring manner. In order to meet this goal, facilitators must know their own fallibilities and sensitive areas and monitor their own reactions. Kottler (1994) suggests the importance of this when addressing the issue of difficult members. To enhance this self-awareness, the facilitator may ask themselves the following questions: "How am I feeling right now?" "Where do these feelings come from?" "Does this person remind me of a difficult family member?" "Am I expecting too much from this person for their level of group development?" Facilitators who are aware of where they are coming from and how they are reacting can more effectively focus on the group member's behavior and its impact on group members. Further, many facilitators develop the ability to use themselves as a thermometer of group temperature—once they can discern their own reactions and separate these out from other group member reactions.

Confronting one's own reactions in an honest way requires emotional maturity and courage, two of the characteristics of effective facilitators identified by Corey and Corey (1997). Furthermore, it is important for the facilitator to avoid labeling of group members (e.g., monopolizer, minimizer) in that labeling depersonalizes the individual and contextualizes them as someone who needs to be managed as opposed to someone who needs to learn (Kottler, 1992). This is an important distinction insofar as the facilitator must strive to assist the individual in understanding their impact upon others, as opposed to judging them or viewing them as an adversary.

In diversity training and preparation of students to become Equal Opportunity Advisors (EOA), this type of neutral stance can become an important component in creating optimal conditions for attitudinal change. Importantly, such a perspective is also central to the concept of modeling appropriate behaviors since the prospective EOA will also find him or herself confronted with "difficult" individuals, and learning in small group can prepare them to be effective in such situations.

Several major areas of difficult member behavior have been identified. Facilitators should recognize that there are varying reasons for any single behavior. Hence, attributions (explanations) for the behavior may vary depending upon the perception of the facilitator. Furthermore, the developmental level of the group, timing, and frequency of behaviors all need to be taken into account by the facilitator. It is important to identify the behavior and entertain possible reasons underlying the behavior.

Following is a discussion of each behavior, possible underlying reasons for the behavior, and typical impact on other members. Possible interventions are then provided, along with illustrations drawn from facilitators who lead diversity training groups. Difficult member behaviors are divided into two groups. The first group includes those behaviors that are more difficult to manage and most disruptive to small group process. This group of behaviors typically requires greater initial facilitator intervention and modeling of appropriate responses before group members can begin to address them. The second group includes behaviors that are somewhat less disruptive to small group

process. These behaviors require relatively less facilitator intervention and are more readily identifiable; hence, group members can more quickly become involved in providing feedback regarding their impact. Because of this, more detail and discussion is provided regarding the first group.

Denial and Minimization, Lack of Participation, Bordering on “clinical”, Intellectualization, and Hostility (direct and indirect)

Denial and Minimization

When leading small groups designed to enhance diversity appreciation among its members, there are specific topics that typically lead to emotional discomfort. One way for a group member to minimize or ward off any discomfort is to deny the existence of a problem or minimize one's reaction to a certain situation. The following statements from facilitators illustrate some important issues and possible interventions related to denial and minimization regarding racism:

Trying to force them to say something doesn't work. Like recently, a student said, "I'm not a racist" and the facilitator said, "I don't believe you." This made a mess, the student took it as if he was being called a liar and the facilitator said, "I did not call you a liar." So, it turned into a struggle and caused some bad feelings on the part of the group.

We had a dysfunctional group—they'd laugh off everything. After corrective feedback they'd say stuff like, "Are you telling us as an equal opportunity advisor we cannot have fun?" After awhile, it's tiring. You have to stop asking. You know already after awhile you have to move on. You try to make them aware, but don't take ownership for their change. The more you try to force change, the more reluctant they become.

Usually, the students jump all over them. Like one female said, "I've never experienced racism until I came to Brevard County and went to a jewelry store and a woman followed me all around." I might possibly ask them, "Where have you lived before?" Because if someone lived in a minority community, maybe they haven't experienced racism. Or, if they joined the military right after living in a minority community, maybe they never experienced it. I think you have to think about it, explore it with the person. I can't be telling people, "You have too experienced racism." You need to know the context.

"I'd go to the other group members who may be similar along with her background and ask them, 'do you think it's possible to have no racism all your life?'"

Wasn't sure how to get through. There was a black female in the group who said, "Well, I don't really feel anything." Saw the *Shadow of Hate* video. She said, "It's not like we didn't already know that was going on." I think she thinks she's never

experienced racism, like "That doesn't happen to me." I try to think of something she said in the past that would indicate she may have experienced racism. If not, I'd throw it out to the group. I've had it happen. I think everyone has experienced some type of racism. It starts with the subtle stuff. Usually we can find examples.

These comments illustrate the importance of intervention that does not appear to directly accuse a group member of a certain attitude (racism). Rather, positive interventions include making real-life connections between the group discussion and events outside of the group, eliciting group input, and gathering information prior to formulating an impression of whether or not an individual has perceived an experience of racism. Furthermore, one facilitator notes that forcing change is ineffectual, and that a group leader needs to know when to move on to a different issue as opposed to belaboring a certain point or issue and risking their credibility.

Possible specific facilitator interventions may include the following:

"If you did experience racism, how might you feel?"

"How do you feel when you hear about sexism or racism?"

"If you did feel the effects of racism, what might you say?"

Lack of Participation

Perhaps one of the major indications of lack of participation is silence and other forms of withdrawal behavior from the group. This can be disruptive for both the other members and the facilitator. Some silent members may maintain that they are actively listening and learning, and that they are silent simply because they want to hear what others have to say. Other silent members may indicate that they generally agree with others and don't want to say something simply for the sake of saying something.

Reasons for lack of participation and silence primarily involve anxiety and internal self-statements. Members may feel anxious about the possibility of looking "dumb" or "foolish." There may be anxieties about "not saying the right thing" or of being rejected by others. Some silent members are fearful that there may be a lack of confidentiality, and thus, carefully guard their "privacy." Silence can also result when a member is fearful of becoming emotional or out of control in the group; in this case, the silence serves a protective function.

Internal self-statements typically involve notions such as, "I don't really have anything important to say" or, "I shouldn't really take up group time to give my opinion." When members are mandated into a group or are not motivated to be in the group, they may tell themselves, "This group is stupid" or, "What good is all this discussion about?" Finally, some members may be silent or non-participatory due to lack of clarity regarding how the group process should work or have perceptions that they need to be called upon by the facilitator.

Small group facilitators handle lack of participation in a variety of ways as the following comments illustrate:

We pull the individual off and state, "You need to sometimes speak up and here's the ramification if you don't." Or, we have them summarize or ask them a direct question. Or, ask another individual, "Are you interested in finding out what this person's views are?"

Never felt I couldn't get anyone to join the group but I've had extremely silent members. I understand...I'm that type of person. Bottom line is if there's nothing to say then there's nothing to say. They were thinkers - what's key to me is to understand the impact of their silence as opposed to thinking they have to say something.

"I really consider the context. I need to understand what is happening in the group, the person's previous behavior in group, and maybe why they are being silent. I may or may not say something."

Usually depends on the time...if early on, I would relay a question to the group or direct a question to the quiet one. Or get another group member to gate keep and get everyone involved. If it continued, I'd pull them to the side and see if anything is going on we're not aware of.

These comments address the importance of context when evaluating the meaning of a silent group member. Further, facilitators reserve the intervention of talking to the individual privately in an effort to ascertain whether some influence outside of the group is operating. There is an understanding of the individual's unique personality and a focus on the impact of the behavior on other group members. That is, some individuals are quieter than others simply because of their personality, and hidden meanings or motivations may not be present.

Specific facilitator interventions may include the following:

"What do you imagine would happen if you talked more?"

"Tell us some things you have observed in here, but are keeping to yourself."

"I'm interested in knowing what you have to say, and I'd like to know more."

"It's been a half an hour since we've heard from certain group members, what does this say about our group norms?"

Bordering on "clinical"

In clarification groups, members are exposed to a variety of lessons, experiences, and small group discussions that may elicit strong affect. Much of this affect relates to past negative experiences such as incest, discrimination, or domestic violence. In an emotional moment, members may self-disclose extremely personal (and heretofore private) information that is not appropriate to a Defense Equal Opportunity Management

Institute (DEOMI) small group. Or, members may emote uncontrollably or reveal a life circumstance that is presently overwhelming. In short, members may appear to need the assistance of a mental health professional or chaplain. Understandably, group members may react to such displays in a variety of ways ranging from distancing maneuvers to attempts at band-aiding or advice-giving.

DEOMI facilitators are aware of the need to ensure their groups are not counseling or therapy groups. However, they must balance this against the DEOMI goal of increased insight and understanding of the group member and how they impact others. This is a delicate balance indeed. Knowing the warning signs of when a person may be approaching the clinical realm is helpful in prevention, redirection, and intervention.

Interventions can be clustered around two areas, prevention and course of action, when confronted with a group member who appears to require the assistance of a mental health professional or chaplain. In terms of prevention, facilitators should know the three major warning signs that an individual may be in need of such services, lest their behavior becomes disruptive to the group goal and process.

The first warning sign is a level of distress that appears disproportionate to the topic or concern being addressed. For example, extreme anger at the film *The Color of Fear* may indicate underlying issues that are deeper and more distressing than the group is prepared to address. Another example would involve a group member becoming quite tearful when invited to participate in a seemingly benign topic.

A second warning sign is the frequency of distressful displays. Whether anger or sadness, an individual who consistently displays such affect across different group topics may require intervention outside of the group. It is one thing to have occasional moments of emotionality, but quite another to experience distressing emotions on a chronic and pervasive basis. Along similar lines, an individual with frequent negative emotionality often does experience interference with their occupations and relationships that can be effectively addressed through professional intervention.

A third warning sign regards the severity and longevity of the emotional display. There is a qualitative difference between an individual who calmly verbalizes anger or chagrin versus one who stands up and starts shouting. Along similar lines, tearing up and remaining in control is different than outright sobbing. A corollary to this is the amount of time it takes for an individual to regroup and compose themselves. An individual who is unable to regain emotional control within a relatively brief period of time (ranging from fifteen to twenty minutes) may require intervention outside of the group setting.

Facilitators have the task of perceiving when a member may require more than the group can provide. Paying attention to the frequency, intensity, and longevity of the behavior and consulting with partners regarding patterns can serve to prevent a potentially disruptive incident or the group "getting in over its head" in an attempt to deal with what is being expressed.

The course of action a facilitator chooses to pursue depends upon the group, developmental level of the group, and the individual who is perhaps bordering on the need for a clinical intervention. The following facilitator comments illustrate potential courses of action within DEOMI small groups:

I actually had to excuse her and I went out to talk to her to see whether she was okay. I sense it, but I'm not a doctor bordering on therapy. I offered her to speak to the chaplain. To get tearful, I see it as normal one or maybe two times, but if it borders on being clinical, for me turning into a psychologist, that's where I draw the line.

"My partner said, 'Thank you for sharing the experience but we need to move on, would you like to discuss this at another time?'"

One time it was really deep, we were discussing sexism, a student said he watched his father beat his mother. I said, "Thanks for sharing." Later, I took him offline and asked him whether he would like to see the chaplain. When it gets into domestic violence, I would not ask probing questions in small group. But, I would probably talk to the student after the group.

"I referred someone to the chaplain because this student was extremely emotional and we didn't know where she was coming from."

We have interviews at the beginning of small group where the student is asked questions about whether they've been discriminated against or been sexually harassed. A student shared that she'd been sexually harassed and she'd been in therapy for this. So, on the segment on sexism, she shared some of this, and a lot of the group members started asking her a lot of questions. So, I redirected the group. I said, "Let's discuss this as a group so one person won't feel like they are the focus of the group."

This latter comment illustrates the importance of knowledge regarding individual member emotional triggers that may border on the clinical realm. When a facilitator is aware of these potential triggers, he or she can redirect the group from focusing on the individual to the group as a whole. This is a preventative intervention that is designed to protect the individual from too much self-disclosure or possible emotional display that would detract from the goal of small group. Other interventions include referral to the chaplain, individual contacts to "check" the person out, and avoiding probing questions when confronted with a personal issue that is beyond the scope of the group.

Intellectualizing

This occurs when potentially emotional content is discussed in a non-emotional and even bland way. Although some cognitive work is a necessary component of group process, attempts should be made to integrate the cognitive with the emotional. Intellectualization is viewed as a defense against certain feelings or emotions. If the

individual can keep such feelings on a detached and cognitive level, they are safe from experiencing emotional pain. Intellectualization should not be confused with provision of necessary facts or details that are designed to provide situational context. It is a matter of degree of facts or details and whether this interferes with underlying affect and expression of emotions.

In addition to a defensive function, the person doing the intellectualization also serves the other group members by keeping attention focused on cognitive, as opposed, to affective concerns. It can become a problem in group when members characteristically prefer the safer territory, and often can result in a bland, but compliant group that does not process feelings. It is important to note that a person who intellectualizes to the exclusion of addressing their feelings may have a past history of becoming overwhelmed by their feelings. Thus, the facilitator must be alert to this possibility, and monitor the level of affect, once displayed.

Facilitators address intellectualization in a variety of ways as the following comments indicate:

Tell them they need to come from the head and talk from the heart and stomach. Tell them the difference between head and heart. Give examples of what I mean without putting the person who does this feeling like they're being put on the spot.

Yes, I've experienced that in both classes. I think it was like an ego defense mechanism where they don't want to deal with the issue at hand. They want someone to argue with and ask about why we do this as opposed to revealing something about himself. It's subsided now, he's sharing more now. He's real as opposed to being superficial in the beginning.

I look at the context. Sometimes people are just trying to explain something, they're not being cognitive, just trying to explain. If I see a pattern though, I may say something about the difference between speaking from the head or heart.

Some further possible interventions include:

"Thoughts are important, but let's also look at some of the feelings behind the thoughts."

"That's an important point, but let me give you three feelings and you choose which one may be closest to how you're feeling right now."

"How is the group feeling right now while they're listening to John?"

Hostility (direct and indirect)

Direct hostility displayed by a group member can result from pent up frustration and anger towards either the group facilitator or group members. It can range from verbal attacks to more physical expressions, such as, standing up in group or moving closer to an individual in an intimidating way. This type of hostility must be managed and stopped, because to allow a pattern of overt hostility has an extremely negative impact on the group. Non-hostile group members are not going to take risks or otherwise make themselves vulnerable when they may be attacked for their opinions or experiences.

The most common form of hostility, however, is an indirect form. Members may act obviously bored or detached, or may consistently question the necessity for small group. They may play "mind games" with the facilitators or other group members, and respond with sarcasm when confronted with such behavior. In some groups, indirect hostility may take the form of continually devaluing or minimizing the importance of sensitive or serious issues. Indirect hostility may also be manifested through leaving during group, non-verbal behavior such as rolling the eyes, or chronic lateness.

The following facilitator comments address both direct and indirect expressions of hostility within small group.

Well, with hostility, it's situational for me. When someone is angry, whether to confront it or not. If a group member gets real angry, stands up for example, I'll stand up also. Angry in tone? That depends on the situation, depends on how often the person has participated. If it's the first time for them to show emotions, or whether it's an ongoing thing. I look for patterns, if there's a pattern, I might say, "So, what are you so angry about?" It all really depends on the situation in the group and how the person has participated in the group.

I base my reaction on the situation at the time. Sometimes you have to reflect the question back to the group and have the group solve the problem. It's not about the facilitator, it's about the group. Have the group find out why (the person is angry) or have the group calm them down.

I've been a target of anger and I've also seen it happen to others. In group, I'll allow it to go to a certain point because anger is not always destructive. But if it gets too disrespectful, I intervene by saying, "Hold on - let's look at the situation" and I start paraphrasing, "What are you concerned about?"

We have one group member who acts bored and detached a lot. We try to get him to understand the impact it has on other group members. I've never said, "You look bored." I've said things like, "You don't look like you're involved, you are giving the impact you're not interested."

I think there's more to it than just being bored with the process. I'll ask questions about, "What is it about this do you find frustrating?" I try to get down to the

frustration, like, "What has it reminded you of?" If someone is still arrogant, or resistant, then I say, "This is a 30-year old institution, we've graduated thousands of EOAs, I understand your frustration, but we can't allow you to impede the process. I encourage you to trust the process." I also am specific, I state the goals of the exercises right up front.

These comments demonstrate the importance of having the group involved in managing the hostility. Further, context is again important. That is, expressions of anger are acceptable but not when it borders on being disrespectful, aggressive, or destructive. Further, the impact of hostility on others, whether overt or more subtle, is emphasized. This latter point is important in training EOAs, who may find themselves in the center of heated exchanges between opposing parties.

In addition, specific facilitator interventions may include:

"Angry content is okay, but let's take a look at the process and how it was communicated."

"Although some of you did not ask to be here, we are here, so how can we make the most of it?"

"What makes it so difficult to be here?"

"Sometimes people act angry when they're really just frustrated, could that be the case here?"

Excessive Questioning (interrogation), Advice-giving, Monopolistic Behavior, Story-telling and Band-aiding

Excessive questioning (interrogation), advice giving, monopolistic behavior, story telling, and band-aiding also represent potentially disruptive small group behaviors. However, once defined within the group, these behaviors are readily identified and understood by group members. After providing such information to the group, facilitators typically model appropriate interventions for stopping the particular behavior. With a group norm that emphasizes task and maintenance functions, group members readily assume the role of intervention when confronted with these behaviors. Thus, this section will be brief relative to previous sections, consisting of a description of the behavior and possible facilitator interventions.

Interrogation

Excessive questioning can be a style of relating to others in the group. This can be disruptive when questions are asked at inappropriate times or when they are irrelevant to the issue at hand. Questions tend to direct attention to the cognitive realm, with attendant decreased focus on the affective realm. For example, an intense emotion is quickly dissipated when someone is questioned regarding a detail of an emotional experience or asked for further information. Further, questioning can often make a

person defensive, particularly when the entire group is involved in uncovering details of an individual's experience or feelings.

Motivations for excessive questioning behavior vary. However, a major motivation is that a group member may use this as a form of remaining safe and unknown in a group. Questions serve to keep the questioner's feelings about others disguised while simultaneously providing information. They can also serve as a benign and superficially neutral way of participating in a group. Questions often have hidden messages or agendas and a personal issue or concern (which the questioner does not want to disclose) often underlies the verbalized question.

Some facilitator interventions may include the following:

"Is there a reason why you ask that question?"

"Rather than questioning, let's focus on making personal statements."

"Can you tell John what led up to your question?"

"What prompted you to ask that specific question, what were you just thinking?"

Advice-giving

Telling people what they should feel or do, as opposed to offering an impression or perception, can have the effect of interrupting the group's flow of thoughts and feelings. (It can also interfere with an individual's coming to a conclusion or changing an attitude.) Advice giving is usually well intentioned, but can incur defensiveness on the part of the person receiving the advice. It can be misinterpreted as talking down to another person or being a "know it all." Resentment can result, with group members feeling like they are being told what to do, as opposed to being allowed to formulate their own resolution of an issue.

Certain group members resort to advice giving for a variety of reasons. It is important to note that it does not serve the best interest of the person who is the receiver of advice. In DEOMI small group, individuals need to resolve feelings about sensitive topics (such as racism and sexism) for themselves. Such insight is more enduring than simply being told how to act or think.

Possible facilitator interventions include:

"That sounds like advice-giving to me, how does the group feel when they are given advice?"

"Rather than trying to fix another's problems by giving advice, let's focus on making personal statements."

"When you give advice, what are you trying to accomplish for yourself?"

Monopolistic behavior

This refers to the member who continually dominates the group interaction or process. They are often hyper verbal and egocentric, and use any opportunity to seize the floor and direct group attention to themselves. In some instances, the monopolizer will stray far from the topic at hand, distracting the group from potentially important issues. Initially, members may find this to be a relief insofar as this directs attention away from them. However, as time goes on, the behavior, if uncorrected, is annoying and distracting for group members.

Reasons for this behavior may lie in the personality of the member. For example, the trait of extraversion includes gregariousness and desire for attention of others. Other reasons include self-centeredness or lack of empathy for others. This difficult behavior may also relate to a variety of internal self-statements. For example, the person may tell themselves, "To be a good member I have to talk a lot" or "I'll talk a lot so the facilitator will like me." Finally, monopolistic behavior may occur when the member is uncomfortable with silence and seeks to fill in the gap.

Some possible interventions follow:

"John, you tend to talk a lot and give a lot of details. In one sentence, what do you most want to tell the group?"

"You've been talking a lot here, but I get lost in the details. I wonder if you can tell us the main theme of what you're trying to say?"

"Let's hear what other group members have to say."

"Let me interrupt you for a minute. Does the group notice anything about what's happening right now? Does this go against a group norm?"

Storytelling

Some members mistakenly believe that self-disclosure or discussion of issues requires extensive detail. Thus, they will go into a lengthy discourse regarding their reasoning or possible early learning experiences that relate to the topic at hand. Initially, some storytelling is appropriate inasmuch as the group is getting acquainted and wanting to share information. However, this can become a problem behavior when too much detail sidetracks the group and frustrates those listening.

A major reason for storytelling involves the individual's personality and need for detail. Individuals differ in the level of detail they believe must be communicated in order to make a point. Another reason involves lack of self-awareness and self-monitoring. Self-monitoring involves noticing the impact one has on others. Some individuals lack this capacity with resultant interpersonal styles that others may find alienating, distracting, or annoying.

Possible facilitator interventions include:

“Does the group notice what is happening right now?”

“How does this story relate to the group topic right now?”

“There is a lot of detail here, can you tell us what you most want us to hear?”

“It’s not necessary to give so much detail or history, try to connect all this detail and history with what’s happening right now.”

“What makes it important that we listen to your story?”

Band-aiding

Some group members have an interpersonal style of trying to lessen the pain of others and comfort them when they are distressed. The term band-aiding, however, specifically implies that this behavior is designed primarily to aid the person providing the comfort. This is in contrast to exhibiting genuine caring and support, which places the interests of the person experiencing the pain as paramount. Hence, the question may be asked, “Who is the support designed to help, the provider or the recipient?” In small group, this may be a difficult question to address.

As noted, band-aiding serves the needs of the giver rather than the receiver. Perhaps the giver is attempting to appear as if they are truly participating in the group. They may be invested in elevating their status in the group as a person who is sensitive and caring. However, it is more likely that the person doing the band-aiding is uncomfortable hearing another person’s emotional pain and is attempting to ameliorate the pain so the group can quickly move onto another topic. In DEOMI small group, band-aiding may begin to look like amateur attempts at counseling an individual. Of course, facilitators need to be mindful that their groups have a boundary line between insight on negative feelings regarding circumscribed topics such as sexual harassment or power and privilege and a counseling group.

Possible interventions include:

“Let’s stop for a minute for some group input. Does anyone notice what’s happening right now?”

“Our group is not necessarily meant to fix emotional pain. Perhaps John and I can talk more about this after our group time.”

Summary

Effective interventions into small group difficult member behaviors require training and experience. It is also important for the facilitator to trust their own judgment and work well with their partner. A sound knowledge of the philosophy of small group process and dynamics is also necessary, as difficult behaviors are typically interrelated with this process. Seeking necessary training and experience is an important prerequisite to effectiveness as a small group facilitator. Once such training and experience has been

accumulated, it is equally important that ongoing consultation with other professionals occur. This is particularly important when dealing with a difficult group member, since such an individual can derail the group process and its mission. In the worst-case scenario, such an individual can propel the entire group toward dysfunctionality. Consulting with a fellow facilitator and colleague can provide important insight into effective interventions within the overall context of group process.

References

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